Social and Emotional Aspects of Teaching and Learning

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The social and emotional competences of students and its role for students' achievement and other developmental outcomes have received a lot of scientific and policy interest in the last decade (e.g. Durlak et al., 2011; OECD, 2015). Recently, the focus has broadened to include also teachers' social and emotional competences (SEC; Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2015). In the current thematic issue *Social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning* we aim to widen this perspective to include also other social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning and present state-of-the-art research in the field.

Social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning can be defined as the social and emotional competences and processes in the educational context within an individual (e.g. students' or teachers' emotions), between individuals (e.g. teacher-student relationship) or phenomena emerging as a result of these competences and processes at the classroom (e.g. class climate), school (e.g. school climate and culture) or community level. There are complex concurrent and longitudinal interrelations among these variables, as they contribute to successful learning and teaching as well as to academic achievement and other developmental outcomes. Some of the topics of social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning are well studied within the educational contexts (e.g. student motivation), while others are not well-studied (e.g. teachers' social and emotional competences). The aim of this issue is to elucidate some of the less-talked-about topics and feed into future research, practice, and policy.

This thematic issue brings together a wide range of topics, reflecting the diversity and heterogeneity of the field. We are particularly proud to have all

educational levels represented: from early childhood education and care (see Hafner & Kranjc), through primary, lower, and upper secondary education with a focus on students (see Šterman Ivančič & Puklek Levpušček; Kozina & Mlekuž; Aram, Jurinec, Horvat, & Košir) and teachers (see Hanson-Peterson, Schonert-Reichl, and Smith; Vidmar & Kerman) all the way to tertiary education (see Laursen & Nielsen). Articles are diverse also in the sense of geography; the majority include Slovenian samples (see Šterman Ivančič & Puklek Levpušček; Kozina & Mlekuž; Aram et al.; Vidmar & Kerman), while others include international samples (see Hanson-Peterson et al; Laursen & Nielsen) or focus on the international comparison (see Hafner & Krajnc).

The first article by Canadian researchers Hanson-Peterson and colleagues reports on the significant role of teachers' SEC (specifically teachers' emotion beliefs) in the implementation of SEC program as well the role of teachers' background characteristics for teachers' SEC. These findings demonstrate the need for teachers' SEC training in this respect. The following article by Vidmar and Kerman continues the topic of teachers' social and emotional competence by introducing the newly developed Teacher's Relational Competence Scale (TRCS), and examining its construct validity and reliability. It demonstrates that a teachers' respect for individuality and their responsibility for the teacher-student relationship (two dimensions of relational competence) can be reliably measured using the TRCS. In the next three articles, the focus shifts from teachers to students in primary and secondary education. Kozina and Mlekuž examine a series of international studies on student achievement; they find a significant effect of internal motivation (i.e. satisfied need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness) for student achievement; students' satisfied need for competence is the strongest and most consistent predictor of their achievement. In the article by Aram and colleagues the self-concept of gifted and high-achieving students in comparison to other students is examined. In general, they find no differences in academic, peer relations, or general self-concept between gifted and high-achieving students. However, gifted girls are identified as a possible high-risk subgroup of gifted students due to their lower peer relations self-concept. Šterman Ivančič and Puklek Levpušček focus their study on the sample from international study PISA. They focus on motivational goals and students' perceived quality of relationship with teachers (i.e. socio-emotional support and negative interactions). The results indicate that perceived support from teachers is especially important for students' motivational goals, while perceived negative interactions are detrimental for academic achievement. In the last two articles, the qualitative approach is used,

bringing a wealth of interesting information. Laursen and Nielsen from Denmark present us with their findings on a programme aiming to develop relational competence in initial teacher education. The programme contributed to student-teachers taking a more reflective and experimental approach to teaching. In the last article, Hafner and Krajnc compare English and Slovenian interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationships in early childhood education settings. They conclude that there are not many differences with regards to non-verbal communication (expect for more physical contact to express affection in Slovenian settings), but find more educator-child verbal interactions in Slovenian settings.

The future research should deepen our understanding about the interrelations of social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning with various student and teacher outcomes and the quality of the educational process. Implications for educational practice (e.g. how to consider social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning in everyday school interactions) and initial and continuous education of teachers in the field of social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning remain a challenge for future research and practice.

It has been an honour to be guest editor of this thematic issue promulgating important issues often overlooked in education practice and policy. I hope this issue, with international authorship, contributes to raising awareness in regard to social and emotional aspects of students and teachers in the educational process and spurs discussion in the field.

References

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